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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the factors that urban and suburban black families have found to be supportive of stability and mobility. All of the families involved were middle income blacks. They all had school aged children under 18 years of age living in the home. Three hundred and five parents were interviewed representing 178 family units. The sample had 49% urban and 90% suburban families. The family structure forms were 93% nuclear. In social economic ratings, half were in the upper class and half in the middle class. The mean family income was $20,000 for males, and $12,000 for females. Four mobility patterns over three generations were found: 1)62% were newly middle class from two generations of working class, 2)23% had lower class grandparents, working class parents, and had become middle class themselves, 3)9% had been middle class for three generations, and 4)6% had parents who were born working class and had moved to middle class. Higher education was valued by the families, with 41% having graduate training beyond college. Both parents had approximately the same education, except fathers had the most advanced degrees. All but one of the females worked, but half of their mothers did not work. The kin help system had been maintained before, during and after mobility. Help with friends was exchanged in areas of emotional support and child care. The family was the primary source of aid in both sites, for both socio-economic status classes, and for all mobility patterns. (Author/AM)

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Internal and External Family Support Patterns that Promote Stability and Mobility in Black Families

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Abstract

THE IMPACT OF EXTENDED FAMILY VARIABLES UPON UPWARD MOBILITY OF BLACK FAMILIES

Harriette Pipes McAdoo, Principal Investigator

This study focused on the factors that Black families have found to be supportive of stability and mobility, who live in an urban and suburban sites in the middle Atlantic area. All parents were 1) Black; 2) presently had middle-income status ($10,000 minimum for one parent; $14,000 minimum for two parents); 3) school aged children living in the home under 18 years old; and 4) had parents over the age of 25. Three hundred and five parents were interviewed (174 mothers, 131 fathers), representing 178 family units.

The sample had 87 (49%) urban and 90 (51%) suburban families. The family structure forms were 93% nuclear, 6% extended, and 2% augmented. Two-parent units were 72% and one-parent units were 28% of the sample. In social economic ratings, 50% were in the upper class and 50% were middle class. The mean income was $20,500 for males; $12,500 for females.

Four mobility patterns over three generations were found: 1) 62% were newly middle class from two generations of working class; 2) 23% had lower class grandparents, working class parents, and had become middle class themselves; 3) 9% had been middle class for three generations; and 4) 6% had parents who were born working class and had moved to middle class.

Higher education was valued by the families,with 41% having graduate training beyond college. Both parents had approximately the same education, except fathers had the most advanced degrees. Education had increased over the generations, and parents held high aspirations for their children.

All but one of the female subjects worked, but half of their mothers did not work. Only one-fourth worked part-time, and their maternal employment decreased when the subjects reached school age. When examined by mobility pattern, grandmothers and mothers did not work in three of the patterns, but did work in the pattern in which the subject's parents were mobile into middle class. Mothers' incomes were needed during the generation that was mobile into middle class, but the majority

did not work the generation before or the one after mobility.

Religion still played an important role in the lives of the majority of the subjects. There was a shift from the more fundamental denominations and an increase toward religion having little impact on 25% of the families.

The kin help system had been maintained before, during,and after mobility. Eighty percent of the families indicated an extensive involvement in the kin exchange system, with the family giving more help than friends or community agencies. Child care, financial, and emotional support were the areas of help both given to and received from kin. No differences were found between urban and suburban sites. A majority appreciated this help. No differences in kin help were found between those born middle class or working class, nor between the four mobility patterns. Parents were able to maintain middle class status for their families of procreation, while still meeting the reciprocal needs of their family of orientation.

The kin exchange was mutually supportive and given freely because of common expectations, not from a sense of severe reciprocal obligations. Newly mobile kin were more pressured to share with those of lower income than those who were born middle class. Little help was given to grandparents who were themselves mobile into middle class. Kin interaction was high in both sites. Suburban families found it more difficult to get to kin who often were in the urban centers.

Help with friends was exchanged in areas of emotional support and child care. They received extensive help from friends, but the family remained the primary source of aid in both sites, for both socio-economic status classes, and all mobility patterns. Non-kin exchanges placed little obligation on the subjects.

The majority of the families had experienced a great many significant life changes in the past two years, but their level of satisfaction with their physical and social environment was positive, across all groups. They felt the most positive things about their family were their mutual love and concern, the sense of together.

Discussion

These families were high achievers who valued education, were under a continuing moderate degree of stress, and were acutely aware of the impact of racism on their lives and on their children. The families who had been upwardly mobile in each of the generations had parents with the highest educational and occupational status, the lowest maternal employment, and the highest level of satisfaction with their lives. They apparently had more human and fiscal resources available to their domestic unit.

Educational achievement tends to peak in the generation in which the family moves to middle income status; it is maintained in the second generation and tends to decline in the third generation. The third generation units had the lowest educational and occupational status, and in several cases had moved to a lower SES status than their parents. The intense motivation to achieve appears to lessen the longer the family is more economically stable. The decrease in the need to move out of abject poverty and the protectiveness reported by all of the parents, may allow the third generation to make choices more consistent with their interest rather than from economic necessity. This decrease in apparent educational aspiration was not supported by the parents, the majority of whom were newly mobile, for they intensely viewed education as the only resource of protection open for Blacks. However, they were well aware that education was only a buffer in a hostile environment and that discrimination, not their own abilities, would be the limiting factor in their family's stability.

The coping strategies used to protect the unit in a hostile ecclogical setting (kin-help exchange, shared parenting and decision-making, and maternal employment), were all operational for these families. These cultural patterns had not been eliminated when the Black family became mobile, but had contributed to the maintenance of its achievements. The extended kin exchange patterns had continued, with

more help being provided to those in poorer situations. They felt positive about this relationship; it was not a burden. Only the most recently mobile felt pressured to provide aid to family members.

Maternal employment of the subjects was high in the families, but was lower in the sub-group that was mobile in each of the three generations. The highest level of employment was in the units that were middle class for the second generation. This particular group had been raised by women who also tended to work more than the other three groups. Contrary to expectations, the grandmothers did not work outside of the home, except for the group that did become mobile. In the grandparent generation, maternal employment clearly was associated with mobility of the family. Grandmothers did not work in the generation before or after mobility. Yet all of the mothers tended to work, a reflection of the economic loss of earning power of the Black unit.

In spite of their stress and the frequency of changes in their lives, they exhibited an overall level of satisfaction with their life situations and were very pleased with their family situations. They were aware of the limits placed on them personally by discrimination and had no expectation that this situation would change in the next few generations, if ever. They felt that they had achieved against great odds and therfore felt a degree of satisfaction with their lot, especially in relation to their reference group of the wider Black community.

Although the family support system was providing physical and emotional support, and was the preferred source of help, they were facing strains for which external supports were needed. The personal and financial strains they were under led them to desire several forms of personal and fiscal counseling that were not perceived as being present in their communities. They wanted competent services, sensitive to the unique strains brought by omnipresent racism, and had a strong preference for services being provided by persons from similar cultural backgrounds.

Many such services were available, but the families tended not to feel comfortable with them, and therfore utilization was low.

The implications from these data for program designers and at the policy level are that services are sorely needed by this most privileged of Black groups and that their needs will differ in important dimensions from that of non-blacks. Services must not be in conflict to the cultural patterns and preferences of the families. The very strong preference for internal support systems would dictate that external supports should augment rather than attempt to substitute the existing family support patterns that have existed for generations.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Sample

by Demography, Family Type and Sex of Head of Household

Group	Urban f	Urban %	Suburban f	Suburban %	Total f	Total %
Parents interviewed						
Mothers	87	56	87	58	174	57
Fathers	68	44	63	42	131	43
Total	155	100	150	100	305	100
Sample						
2-parent units	68	77	60	67	128	72
1-parent unit	20	23	30	33	50	28
Total	88	100	90	100	178	100
One-parent units						
Mother as head	19	95	27	90	56	93
Father as head	1	5	3	10	4	7
Total	20	100	30	100	60	100

Family Type	Structure	Defined	Urban f	Urban %	Suburban f	Suburban %	Total f	Total %
2-parent	Simple nuclear	Parents, children	66	97	55	92	121	95
	Simple extended	Parents, children, rel.	2	3	3	5	5	4
	Augmented nuclear	Parents, children, rel. non-relatives	-	-	2	3	2	2
			68	100	60	100	128	101
1-parent	Attenuated nuclear	Parent, children	16	80	28	93	44	88
	Atten. extended	Parent, children, rel.	3	15	2	7	5	10
	Augmented atten. nuclear	Parent, children, rel. non-relatives	1	5	-	-	1	2
			20	100	30	100	50	100
		Nuclear units	82	93	83	92	165	93
		Extended units	5	6	5	6	10	6
		Augmented	1	1	2	2	3	2
			88	100	90	100	178	101
		Demography Total	88	49	90	51	178	100

Table 2

SES Summary

Social Class	Hollingshead/Redlich Standard f	Standard %	Modified f	Modified %	Self Rating: Self f	Self %	Parent f	Parent %	Grandparent f	Grandparent %	Neighbors f	Neighbors %
Upper	55	43	66	51	8	7	2	2	1	1	7	6
Middle	61	47	50	39	88	74	30	26	12	11	89	75
Working	12	9	12	9	22	19	78	68	80	72	18	15
Lower	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	4	18	16	4	3
Total	129	100	129	100	119	101	111	100	111	100	118	99

Table 3

Educational Levels for the Total and by the Four Mobility Patterns

Educational Level	Group: Subject %	Father %	Mother %	Paternal Grandpa %	Paternal Grandma %	Maternal Grandpa %	Maternal Grandma %
			Total				
Graduate, Prof.	41	6	6	1	-	1	-
College	37	8	10	4	-	1	3
Some College	16	14	16	10	7	13	9
High School	6	35	39	16	21	18	24
Some High School			1				
Junior High	1	18	13	16	17	22	21
Grade School	-	20	15	53	54	44	44
Total	101	101	100	100	99	99	101
N	127	127	125	70	70	72	78
			Upwardly Mobile this Generation				
Graduate, Prof.	46	-	3	-	-	-	-
College	33	5	8	4	-	-	3
Some College	19	10	13	18	10	11	10
High School	1	33	40	14	21	17	15
Some High School							
Junior High	1	19	15	14	10	17	23
Grade School	-	32	22	50	59	54	49
Total	100	99	101	100	100	99	100
N	79	78	76	28	29	35	39
			Upwardly Mobile each Generation				
Graduate, Prof.	45	-	-	-	-	4	-
College	52	7	14	-	-	-	-
Some College	-	17	24	-	-	4	8
High School	3	48	41	10	17	20	23
Some High School	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Junior High	-	28	14	17	21	36	23
Grade School	-	-	3	72	62	36	46
Total	100	100	99	99	100	100	100
N	29	29	29	29	29	25	26
			Upwardly Mobile Parents' Generation				
Graduate, Prof.	29	63	50	-	-	-	-
College	29	13	13	-	-	-	14
Some College	29	-	13	13	13	29	-
High School	14	25	13	38	38	14	57
Some High School	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Junior High	-	-	-	25	25	14	14
Grade School	-	-	13	25	25	43	14
Total	101	101	102	101	101	100	99
N	7	8	8	8	8	7	7
			Middle Class over Three Generations				
Graduate, Prof.	9	17	9	20	-	-	-
College	33	25	16	40	-	20	-
Some College	25	42	16	20	25	40	17
High School	33	17	50	20	25	20	50
Some High School	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Junior High	-	-	9	-	25	-	-
Grade School	-	-	-	-	25	20	33
Total	100	101	100	100	100	100	100
N	12	12	12	5	4	5	6

Table 4

Summary of Educational Achievement for

Head of Household, Parents, and Paternal Line

Educational Level of Head of Household	
Graduate or Professional training	41%
College	53%
High School	6%
	100%

Degrees Earned by Subjects

Degree	Father f	Father %	Mother f	Mother %
Ph.D., Ed.D.	17	12	8	5
Med., Law	12	8	2	1
Masters	29	20	37	24
Bachelors	51	36	52	34
AA, AS, RN, Business	7	5	12	8
High School +	27	19	44	29
Total	143	100	155	101

Degrees Earned by Paternal Ancestors

					Paternal				Maternal			
	Father		Mother		Grandpa		Grandma		Grandpa		Grandma	
Degree	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Ph.D., Ed.D.	1	1										
Med., Law	1	1							1	1		
Masters	5	4	7	5	1	1						
Bachelors	9	7	14	10	2	3	1	1	1	1	2	3
AA, AS, RN, Business	5	4	4	3	3	4	1	1	2	3	2	3
High School +	59	45	71	53	16	23	18	26	20	28	24	31
None	50	39	39	29	47	68	49	71	48	67	50	64
Total	130	101	135	100	69	99	69	99	72	100	78	101

Table 5

Occupations by Percentage of Male and Female Subjects and their Ancestors over Three Generations

Occupation	Subject %	Father %	Mother %	Paternal Grandpa %	Paternal Grandma %	Maternal Grandpa %	Maternal Grandma %
Occupations of Male Subjects and their Ancestors							
Executives	40	7	1	1	-	2	-
Managers	43	9	15	4	5	3	5
Administrative	10	7	3	13	1	10	1
Clerical	3	19	10	35	5	40	9
Skilled	2	27	5	16	2	13	1
Semi-skilled	1	14	6	4	3	9	1
Unskilled	1	18	17	27	13	23	14
Not work	-	-	43	-	71	1	69
Total	100	101	100	100	100	101	100
Occupations of Female Subjects and their Ancestors							
Executives	22	8	1	10	1	7	-
Managers	37	12	25	5	13	3	4
Administrative	25	11	5	7	2	7	1
Clerical	14	24	11	39	8	50	8
Skilled	-	20	5	16	1	10	3
Semi-skilled	1	10	7	5	3	9	8
Unskilled	-	14	14	19	18	15	14
Not work	1	-	33	-	54	-	63
Total	100	99	100	101	100	101	101

Table 6

Occupations of Second Generation Fathers of Male and Female by the Four Mobility Patterns

Occupation	Upward in Present Generation		Upward in each Generation		Upward in Parents' Generation		Middle Class over Three Generations	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Occupation of Subjects by Mobility Pattern								
Executive, Prof.	25	37	3	27	9	41	5	29
Manager	31	46	7	64	10	46	6	35
Administrative	6	9	1	9	3	14	2	12
Clerical	2	3	-	-	-	-	2	12
Skilled	2	3	-	-	-	-	1	6
Semi and Unskilled	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	6
Total	67	100	11	100	22	101	17	100
Occupations of Fathers of Male Subjects by Mobility Patterns								
Executive, Prof.	1	1	1	3	4	50	3	25
Manager	3	4	3	10	1	13	4	33
Administrative	4	5	3	10	1	13	1	8
Clerical	16	21	6	21	-	-	2	17
Skilled	22	29	10	35	-	-	1	8
Semi-skilled	14	18	3	10	1	13	-	-
Unskilled	17	22	3	10	1	13	1	8
Total	77	100	29	99	8	102	12	99
Occupations of Fathers of Female Subjects by Mobility Patterns								
Executive, Prof.	-	-	1	3	5	31	4	20
Manager	3	4	3	8	7	44	3	15
Administrative	7	10	4	11	1	6	4	20
Clerical	20	29	13	34	-	-	3	15
Skilled	14	20	10	26	2	13	3	15
Semi-skilled	8	12	5	13	1	6	1	5
Unskilled	17	25	2	5	-	-	2	10
Total	69	100	38	100	16	100	20	100

Table 7

Comparisons of Decision-making Final Scores by

Demography, SES, and Mobility Pattern and Correlation Between Parents

Total	N	M	SD	DF	t		p
Father	122	20.47	2.95				
Mother	161	22.48	4.25				
Demography							
Urban	66	20.36	9.56	120	- .42		.66
Suburban	56	20.59	7.88				
SES							
Upper class	63	19.84	9.81	119	-2.30		.02
Middle class	58	21.03	6.35				
Mobility Pattern					MSq	F	p
Mother Response							
1. Up this gen.	64	21.34	2.72	3	6.59	.62	.56
2. Up each gen.	19	21.74	1.20	110	9.52		
3. Parents MC	13	21.77	4.30	113			
4. MC 3 gen.	18	20.44	4.12				
	114	21.32	3.07				
Father Response							
1. Up this gen.	65	20.40	3.00	3	3.47	4.06	.75
2. Up each gen.	22	20.73	2.57	111	8.53		
3. Parents MC	11	21.36	2.42	109			
4. MC 3 gen.	15	20.87	3.33				
	113	20.62	2.90				

Correlation of Father's and Mother's Final Scores: $r(117) = .340$; $p \leq .01$

Table 8

Employment of Subjects' Mothers at Different Periods of their Lives for Total and by Mobility Pattern

Amount of Employment	Male Subjects 1-5 yrs f	%	6-10 yrs f	%	Female Subjects 1-5 yrs f	%	6-10 yrs f	%
Not work	69	49	61	42	78	47	70	42
Full time	40	28	27	19	55	33	39	24
Part time	22	16	51	35	23	14	52	31
Don't know	11	8	5	4	9	6	5	3
Total	142	101	144	100	165	100	166	100

Maternal Employment by Mobility Pattern

	Up this Generation 1-5 yrs %	6-10 yrs %	Up each Generation 1-5 yrs %	6-10 yrs %	Up parents Generation 1-5 yrs %	6-10 yrs %	MC for three Generations 1-5 yrs %	6-10 yrs %
Not work	51	32	50	35	29	35	61	32
Full time	25	38	31	35	53	59	39	43
Part time	20	27	14	30	12	-	-	25
Don't know	4	3	6	-	6	6	-	-
Total	100	100	101	100	100	100	100	100
N	71	71	36	37	17	17	28	28

Table 9

Types of Help Exchanged by Mobility Patterns
as Reported by Mothers

	From Family				From Friends			
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %
Help Received								
Child care	38	32	50	27	24	32	39	35
Financial	27	29	25	23	14	13	8	35
Emotional	22	24	25	32	48	52	46	22
Repairs, chores	11	9		9	9	3	8	4
Clothes, furn.	2	6		9	5	-	-	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	101	100
N	55	34	12	22	58	31	13	23
Help Given								
Child care	24	34	46	42	25	17	46	30
Financial	37	25	15	27	18	25	23	39
Emotional	18	22	31	23	46	53	31	30
Repairs, chores	8	-	-	-	7	6	-	-
Clothes, furn.	13	19	8	8	5	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	101	101	100	99
N	62	32	13	26	61	36	13	23

Mobility Patterns 1 - Upward in present generation
2 - Upward in each generation
3 - Upward in parent's generation
4 - Middle class over three generations

Table 10

Amount of Help Received and Attitude Toward Help Exchanged as Reported by Mothers

	Fathers		Mothers	
	f	%	f	%
Amount Received				
Great deal	110	66	98	66
Somewhat	31	19	29	20
Very Little	9	5	7	5
None	16	10	15	10
Total	166	100	149	101
Attitude Toward Help				
Appreciate help	57	46	78	52
Appreciate and expect	25	20	27	18
Appreciate, not expect	6	5	17	11
Expect in emergencies only	5	4	3	2
Hesitate to ask	11	9	10	7
Do not depend on family	11	9	4	3
Never need help	9	7	11	7
Total	124	100	150	100

Table 11

Frequency of Samples' Responses to Question of Perception of Possible Cause for Ten Year Difference in Life Span between Blacks and whites by Demography

Responses	Urban		Suburban		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Stress, pressures, racism	64	40	100	37	164	38
Economics (poorer working conditions and lower living standards)	17	11	68	25	85	20
Diet	34	21	51	19	85	20
Lack of medical care and facilities	22	14	32	12	52	12
Heredity	-	-	13	5	13	3
Don't agree on life-span difference	11	7	2	1	13	3
Don't know	12	8	7	3	19	4
Total	160	101	273	102	431	100

Table 12

Stress Responses by Mobility Pattern

Mobility Patterns	N	M	SD	df	f	p
	Stress Totals 2 years					
1	61	242	208.58	3	2.58	.06
2	20	140	89.57	109		
3	12	230	108.80	106		
4	17	318	273.76	-		
	Stress Totals 6 months					
1	61	93.03	90.46	3	2.65	.05
2	20	56.90	58.86	109		
3	12	10.74	59.27	106		
4	17	140.35	133.47	-		
	Stress Frequency 2 years					
1	61	10.59	8.15	3	2.30	.08
2	20	6.90	4.18	109		
3	12	10.08	3.55	106		
4	17	13.59	11.22	-		
	Stress Frequency 6 months					
1	61	4.61	4.12	3	2.29	.08
2	20	2.95	2.59	109		
3	12	5.50	2.39	106		
4	17	6.24	2.46	-		

Mobility Patterns 1 - Upward in present generation
2 - Upward in each generation
3 - Upward in parent's generation
4 - Middle class over three generations

Table 13

Cross Tabulations of Decision-Making

Responses by Type of Decision and Sex of Parent

Majority Decision Maker	Decision	Percent of Person Making Decision Both	Father	Mother
Father	Purchase Car	46%	54%	1%
	Buy Insurance	45	49	6
Mother	Wife Work?	42	7	51
	Food Budget	27	23	50
Both	Jobs Parents Take	77	17	6
	Select House	77	10	13
	Child's Curfew	70	18	12
	Birth Control to Use	67	7	25
	TV Program	65	14	21
	To Do When Ill	59	14	28
	Children's Job	54	14	32

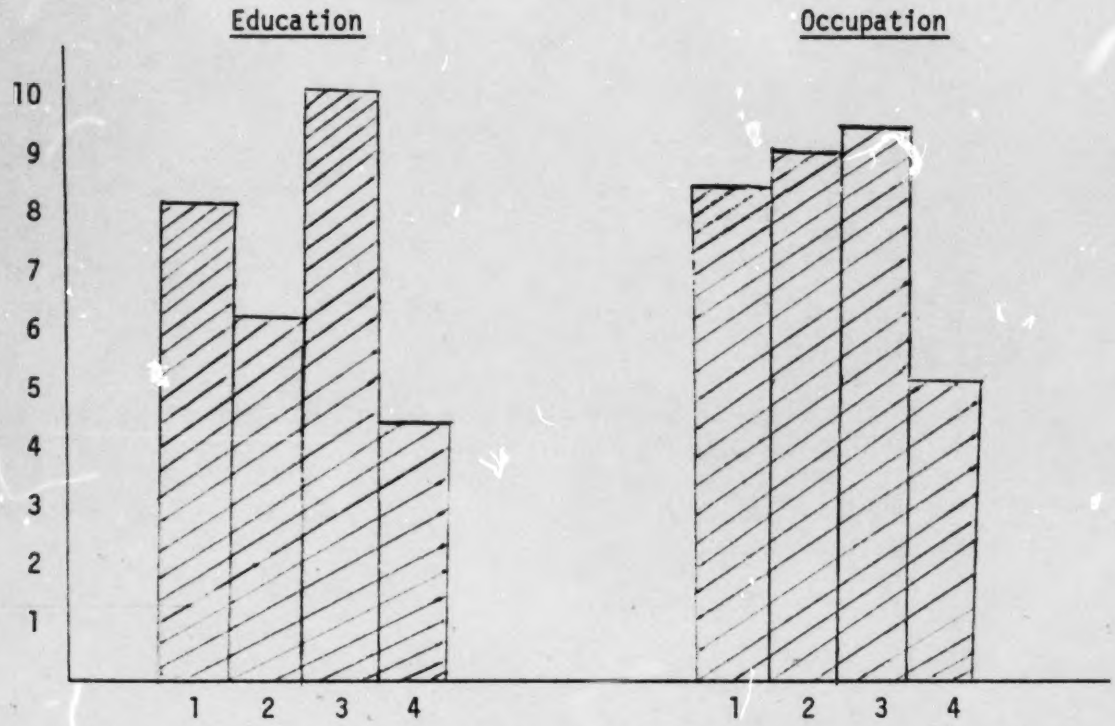

Fig. 2. Percentage of fathers in top two educational levels and top two occupation status levels by four mobility patterns.

1 - Up this generation
2 - Up parent's generation
3 - Up each generation
4 - Middle class three generations

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